

“Very good. One grilled swordfish with ricotta and wild mushrooms; one seared lamb cutlet with raspberry coulis and dill pancakes; one Balinese chicken satay with mint, lemon grass and peanut sauce; one steak, between rare and medium rare, no more than thirty seconds over, yes, I’ll tell the chef, sir, with figs and gorgonzola but on the side; one vegetarian couscous with organic goat’s cheese and asparagus tart...’ The waiter grimaces a false smile through gritted teeth and turns to me. ‘And now... what would you like, sir?’”

I empathised with these experiences shared by Jeff Lucas during a visit with friends to a restaurant. Everyone else always seems much more accomplished and adventurous in their menu selections than I am. I’ll seldom be first to order, listening to what my friends have to say. I’m always afraid too that when their dishes arrive, they’ll look much better or BIGGER than mine. And then, much to the chagrin of my long-suffering wife, my palate isn’t all that adventurous anyway. I’m just as happy with a plate of mince steak, carrots and onions and boiled potatoes!

Recently I was introduced to the joys of Subway, the sandwich chain store. I would have been happy with a ham sandwich, but was suddenly confronted with six different breads, a plethora of fillings and sauces. The waitress was charming, but didn’t take any casualties as she explained everything with the verbal dexterity of the late Ronnie Barker. All I could do was nod my head as if I understood what she was saying, before “chickening out” and settling for the daily special.

We live in a world with an amazing number of choices. How do you like your eggs? Do you want them sunny-side up, poached, boiled or scrambled? Or to get back to my bread and ham, think of all the different ways you could have a ham sandwich. Now there’s a topic of conversation for a winter evening in front of the fire... with coal standard or premium, peat or turf Antrim or Tyrone, or simple glow effect!

The variety of Christian life, activity and outlook never ceases to amaze me here in West. One of our most meaningful events this year has been to complete “Clearing our Vision”, a course designed to give us clearer FOCUS for the way ahead. In this edition you can read all the details.

Christmas is a wonderful time of year. Again it comes to us packaged in an endless array of colour and size. For me, as I have perhaps been hinting, all the choices can simply be mind-blowing – presents, food, consumerism, which one?

Two thousand years ago Jesus was coming for tea and all the preparations had to be made. I love Martha because she was so practical, straightforward and direct. Unfortunately, however, as many of us do, she became totally stressed out. Mary preferred the company to all the fuss and bother, and Jesus agreed.

I can almost hear Him saying to us this Christmas: “Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

May He repeat your name over and over again until He brings you to that place where you rest in Him this Christmas and always: “Immanuel –God with us” “O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Immanuel.”

*Agape! - Charles McMullen*